

UPPER ST. CROIX PARISH SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE UPDATE



The Upper Saint Croix Parish SPRC has approved returning to in-person services at Central United Methodist Church. Sunday services will be at 8:30 am beginning May 2nd. When you come please use the same protocols that were used last summer. At the same time there will still be ZOOM access available.

Atlas Church will have drive-in park services at 10:00 am beginning Sunday, May 2nd as well. We are looking forward to seeing everyone.



Barbara Loomis, SPRC Chair

Announcements (Insert) May 2nd, 2021

1. Today is "Fifth Sunday of Easter." Christ is risen, Hallelujah! May the good news bring you and your family members new life and hope!
2. We will begin in-person services beginning the first Sunday of May (5/2). In-door service is at 8:30 am in Grantsburg, and Outdoor (drive-in) service at 10 am in Atlas Park. The Zoom Live service will be offered at 8:30 am on Sundays. Please notice that we should use the same protocol and precautions-wearing facial masks and keeping a social distance.
3. May 2nd is a Communion Sunday. If you want to join via the Zoom service, you may pick the communion elements from the church or prepare them by yourselves. Otherwise, we provide the elements at the in-person and drive-in services as individual packs. See the Pastor's office hours.
4. Sunday school will begin this week. Everyone is required to wear a face mask.
5. Pastor Jenny's office hours: Grantsburg is 9 am to 5pm Tuesdays and Wednesdays at St. Croix Falls is 11 am to 4 pm.
6. We do "Tablet Ministry" for those who don't have a computer and internet at home. Please let Pastor Jenny know if you need a tablet to view the service's video clip, or to make a connection to the Live service.
7. Notice a few important calendar dates: May 9- Mother's Sunday, May 16-Graduation Sunday, and May 23- Pentecost Sunday.
8. An Online Zoom Service is scheduled for this Sunday at 8:30 am. Here is the Zoom service link. **This link will be posted on our parish website and Facebook page.** The link will be the same in May.

Topic: Sunday Zoom Services in May

Time: 08:30 AM Central Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82558087434?pwd=RGVHSzFXSURVLOJuSFZNBTRwNU83Zz09>

***Please notice that it works only when the host opens it at service time on Sunday. When you check the other time, it doesn't work.**

- If you are attending the Zoom service for the first time, you may be asked to download the Zoom app. It is free and you will need it.
- If you want to join from your smartphone with video, click the link.
- If you want to dial the number without video, you may dial the number below and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

Phone: +1 312 626 6799,

Meeting ID: 825 5808 7434, Passcode: 918014

Any questions regarding technological issues of the service, contact pastor Jenny.

9. You can hear "the service (the scripture lesson, song, sermon and prayer-about 30 minutes) by phone" whenever you are able by calling 1-715-298-0854. We will upload a new one every Sunday afternoon.
10. **We need volunteers to be the liturgist every Sunday.** If you are willing to be a liturgist, let Pastor Jenny know which Sunday you are available, and we welcome a special song with your family members.
11. If you miss a Sunday service, you may view a video clip on Facebook or use materials (mailed, emailed or on the Parish website) for a home service. **We have the link to our parish Facebook page on the homepage of our website. New clips will be uploaded every Sunday afternoon.**
12. You may want to send your giving (offerings) to your church. If you have any questions regarding services or offerings, please email the church office at: centralumc2016@gmail.com.

You may send your giving (offering) to the church **(Please make your check payable to your individual church's name.)**

Atlas UMC: PO Box 254, Luck, WI 54853

Grantsburg-Central UMC: PO Box 128, Grantsburg, WI 54840

St. Croix Falls UMC: PO Box 458, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024

13. This Week's Birthdays and Anniversaries:

*If we miss your birthday, please let us know by email or phone call: centralumc2016@gmail.com / 715-463-2624.

Kate Lehne	5/2
Becca Drohman	5/3
LuAnne Martell	5/3
Dan & Emily Rahkola	5/3
Ashleigh Olson	5/4
Colleen Norenberg	5/4
Jason Frenette	5/4
Naomi McLean	5/6
Casper Rahkola	5/6
Charlie & Joan Zeigler	5/7





Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.
Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

May 2nd, 2021
John 15:1-8

“Abide in the Lord!”

My grandfather was a farmer. He had larger rice fields. He went out early every morning to look after the fields. He would pull wild weeds off as soon as he found them among the rice plants and gave them enough water and nutrition to grow well. I didn't know about farming, but I knew how much my grandfather loved his job. The days my grandfather was happy were mostly the days the rice plants grew well. And the days my grandfather was unhappy were mostly the days that when something went wrong with the rice plants. Whether my family members' felt good or bad depended on how my grandfather was feeling. My grandfather wished the rice plants would have provided more and better fruits. As my grandfather worked hard on the rice plants, the plants didn't need to work hard, but they enjoyed the water and nutrition provided by my grandfather. If they were happy and grew well, my grandfather was happy.

Today's scripture talks about the parable of the vine: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower” (John 15:1): I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5). Jesus is the vine; God the Father is the vinegrower (gardener), and we are the branches. This parable shows us how God loves us to bear fruit. In the parable, God is the gardener. What would the gardener like the branches to do?

Last year, I had a small garden in the yard of the parsonage. I looked after my garden as much as I had time too because I wanted to protect it from the wild animals; I wanted them to grow well and because I wanted them to bear a lot of fruit. What about you? What would you want from your garden? Perhaps, you may want it to have a lot of fruit. Jesus taught us that God wants us to bear much fruit beyond salvation. To bear much fruit, we have to abide in the Lord. I'm sure that we are saved in faith by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. However, that's not enough. If God's grace saves us, we should pay God's grace forward by loving our neighbors. The United Methodists stand on practicing faith by acts. Let us bear much fruit to glorify God. That is the way we abide in the Lord.

Jesus says to us, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me” (John 15:4). If the branches were not connected to the vine, the branches would be dried and died. In other words, if we are not connected with Jesus, our Spirits may dry up and died. Jesus told his disciples the vine's parable story to explain how important the intimate relationship is between Jesus and us. Remember that God is the gardener, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. God would work hard for the vine, and we just hold the vine as the branches. As God gives us grace, we can enjoy His grace, holding Jesus, and then eventually, we may get fruit. When my grandfather worked hard in the rice field, the rice plants would enjoy the nutrition and water my grandfather provided. When the gardener worked hard to remove branches that don't bear fruit, the remaining branches bear much fruit. Because God is working hard for us, we don't need to work hard, but we just need to abide in Jesus to bear fruit.

The Gospel of Matthew says, “By their fruits, you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16). Like this, if we abide in Jesus, we may get Jesus' fruits. In other words, depending on our fruits, we can be distinguished whether we are holding Jesus or not.

What is Jesus' fruit? As soon as you hear this question, I can imagine the nine fruits of the Spirit come to your mind first. Yes, they are, such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus' fruits are not only the nine fruits of the Spirit but also being his disciples. Jesus says, "You bear much fruit and become my disciples" (John 15:8). As we get much of Jesus' fruits, we can become Jesus' disciples. Being Jesus' disciples is to follow what he taught us and how he lived. In other words, the disciples are to live with his teaching in everyday life. As he did, one of the ways we can do this befriending the outcast, the needy, the weak, and the powerless. We all are the brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The way we open minds for others is also a way to bear Jesus' fruit. Some think that we still need to work hard. Perhaps, until it is used as our everyday lifestyle and becomes a habit, we may need to practice it intentionally. However, if you abide by the Lord, I'm sure you can love God and love others naturally in everyday life. Also, if we enjoy worshiping God and praising His name, it will be the fruit, God will be pleased. The Letter of Hebrews says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

Some folks would focus on the gardener's act, which removes the branches. As Jesus talks about it, "the gardener/vinegrower removes every branch in the vine that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." If you have experience in gardening, especially for fruit trees such as apple trees, pear trees, or vines, you may get a better understanding of this parable. We had a pear tree in our backyard when I was in childhood. It didn't bare good fruit one year. My grandfather gave it more nutritious soil and removed some branches. I didn't understand why my grandfather removed the branches. I thought that if it has more branches, it will get more fruit. However, my grandfather explained that he removed some branches to get more and better fruit. As he said, we had more and better pears in the next year.

Some people interpret the gardener's act to remove the branches as punishment. And then, if they experience illness, financial difficulties, family issues, or broken relationships, they think that God punished them. However, I don't like that kind of interpretation because God loves us; God's love is steadfast and everlasting love. God gives us grace. God's grace is open for everyone. Therefore, if we abide in the Lord, we are never punished by God. As you may know, when the gardener removes the branches that don't bear fruit it is to help the remaining branches to bear much fruit. If the gardener leaves all the branches that don't bear fruit, the branches might spoil the other branches. Jesus says, "you have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). Because we are cleansed by God's word already, we, who abide in Jesus, are not punished. The Letter of Romans says, "therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). To prune the branches is not to punish the vine or branches, but to make them bear more fruit" (John 15:2).

Somehow, we may experience something happening in our lives, but that is not because we did something wrong. It happened in our life journey. As the gardener removes the branches to bear more fruit, there might be God's blessings on the other side of our life suffering. One of the blessings is that we don't need to work hard as the branches. According to God's grace, our God, the gardener, is working hard for us. We, as the branches, have to connect with the Lord. This connection doesn't mean just belonging to the church, but the more intimate connection with the faith community. The Letter of Revelation shows us this intimate relationship with Jesus; "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Who knows, perhaps Jesus would come like the least, the last, the weak, or the powerless. We have to open our minds, hearts, and doors to have an intimate relationship with Jesus. Therefore, abide in the Lord all the time! Thanks be to God. Amen!